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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON SYRIA'S PULLOUT/US  
INVOLVEMENT

#### Summary

-- Lead story in all papers today, March 7, highlights developments in Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon. Other stories focus on King Abdullah's visit to Saudi Arabia and the Jordanian government's plan to submit for endorsement a draft law that would regulate the work of professional associations in Jordan.

#### Editorial Commentary

-- "Timid step needs reciprocity"

Centrist, influential among the elite English daily Jordan Times (03/07) editorializes: "Syrian President Bashar Asad may have bought his country some time and deflected some of the mounting pressure on his government when he announced that Syrian troops will withdraw to the Beqaa area and the to the Syrian -Lebanese border.. Still, Damascus left major issues unattended to. To begin with, there was no mention of a timetable for the Syrian withdrawal.. Second, by announcing that troop withdrawal means redeployment to Syria's border with Lebanon, Damascus makes it understood that its armed forces will stay put within proximity of major cities in Lebanon, ready and able to reenter the neighboring country whenever it deems that its own security is threatened. At the same time, there was no mention of any withdrawal of the Syrian intelligence networks.. The Syrian president's move, again, can be viewed as spectacular and dramatic. However, the ultimate move has not been made, and the results hinge on too many factors to enable clear assessment. The one thing that can convince the Arabs and the world at large of the altruistic intentions of the United States is for President George Bush to lend an ear to Syria and assume a less belligerent posture. It is a truism that democracy and the rule of law cannot be brought by the barrel of a gun."

-- "America between principles and practices"

Daily columnist Fahd Fanek writes on the back-page of semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (03/07): "The problem with the U.S. policy is that it has no credibility. It rejects the Syrian 'occupation' of Lebanon but allows itself to occupy Iraq; it calls for the freedom of people but takes the side of the occupying state of Israel; it raises the banner of international law but rebels against international legitimacy; it declares itself a defender of human rights but commits torture in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo. What is wrong is not in the principles that the United States is calling for but rather U.S. practices that contradict those principles. Before the United States can promote these principles in the world, it must abide by them."

-- "Lebanon and Othman's shirt!"

Daily columnist Rakan Majali writes on the back-page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (03/07): "It has become clear and without the shadow of a doubt that the killing of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri was part of the American scheme to start a confrontation between Syria and Lebanon.. At the same time, there is this demonstration that is happening today marking three weeks since Hariri's assassination, which means that there will be more demonstrations marking four, five, six, a hundred and even a thousand weeks since Hariri's assassination, until that time when America succeeds in achieving one of two things: a civil war or Lebanon's isolation from Syria and the Arab world.. It is clear that America has employed Hariri's killing to serve its political

objectives. That explains why it was upset by Syria's decision to withdraw from Lebanon, calling it insufficient and casting doubt on Syrian's intentions.. The repercussions and changes that have occurred in Lebanon since the assassination indicate who the beneficiary is."

-- "Syria's withdrawal and the 1990 Iraqi scenario"

Daily columnist Yaser Za'atreh writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (03/07): "The Syrian President presented a new vision for dealing with the Lebanese issue. While it is clear that this was an attempt to get out of the crisis with the least damage, America's reaction and the position of some in the Lebanese opposition stress that this move is insufficient and that the hunt will continue. (This is) because a mere Syrian military withdrawal from Lebanon is not the objective. The objective is the full political and security withdrawal of Syria so that the military claws of Hezbollah will be clipped and its political presence eventually marginalized. Nothing can stop this hunt. The issue is open wide so Washington, which is living in crisis in Iraq, may look for another outlet.. What needs to be said in this context is that targeting Syria in this manner does not mean that the American chain is made up of only two links, Iraq and Syria. What is happening with the greater Middle East project that is designed to reshape the region? Do the leaders who are in collaboration with the targeting of Syria today really believe they are buying their safety?"

-- "The Syrian army pullout"

Columnist Kamal Rashid writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (03/07): "The Syrian military withdrawal is) A measure that brought joy in Syria and Lebanon and all around the Arab and Muslim world, which means that it is a wise and sound measure.... No one exonerates the Syrians from their mistakes and unacceptable conduct in Lebanon and no one denies that Syria has borne a difficult load, exhausting itself and its army and those to whom it came originally to aid. But the Syrian presence was not without willing partners. It existed as a result of the Taif decisions and for the benefit of Lebanon. The Syrian presence in Lebanon was not an occupation, but rather it came about as a Lebanese, Syrian and Arab benefit. It existed to put out the discord in Lebanon and to protect the borders. It was an emergency situation that had to come to an end. If America, France and the Security Council are calling this presence an occupation and are saying that Lebanon needs to be liberated, then what do they say about the American presence in Iraq and the Israeli presence in Palestine?"

-- "The American democracy"

Columnist Ibrahim Absi writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (03/07): "I do not think there is anyone in this world who does not support President George Bush in his call for eradicating tyranny and oppression in this world.. Yet, how could the U.S. President and Washington set the rules of freedom and democracy within the internal affairs and civil society organizations of any country without directly intervening in the affairs of that country? Would this intervention not be considered an aggression on freedom and democracy and the utmost form of oppression and tyranny? What kind of freedom and democracy is this that Washington seeks to impose by force? Could we really call it freedom and democracy or some sort of slavery and domestication that the United States is seeking to establish in the world to facilitate its hegemony and power over the world? Will America succeed in imposing this American version of freedom and democracy or do we have a date with new wars?"

-- "Inventory"

Chief Editor Taher Udwan writes on the back-page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (03/07): "Achieving civil peace in Lebanon was a great accomplishment for Syria, and establishing security and stability there was just as important, and yet the Lebanese people were not the first in history to turn against the power that freed them from occupation or civil wars.. Security and stability come first, but dignity, freedom, political and human rights come before that.. The issue is not about conducting an inventory between Syria and Lebanon, who did what for whom. It is simply a matter of standing

with oneself and with the neighbor to determine the limits of freedom in the relationship between the two countries and the two people. Syria did well to adopt its decision to withdraw, because this provides the suitable circumstances for the birth of new relations between the two countries."

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